

VZCZCXRO6747
RR RUEHPT
DE RUEHBN #0087/01 2080353
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 270353Z JUL 09
FM AMCONSUL MELBOURNE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4972
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 3617
RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH 1589
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 2110

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MELBOURNE 000087

NOFORN
SIPDIS

STATE FOR INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/27/2019
TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AS](#)
SUBJECT: BIO NOTES - RICHARD MARLES, MP

REF: A. CANBERRA 542
[1](#)B. CANBERRA 188
[1](#)C. MELBOURNE 69

Classified By: Justin Kolbeck, Pol/Econ Officer for Reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) Consul General met with Richard Marles, federal Member for Corio and Australia's new Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry on July 13. A rising star in the Australian Labor Party (ALP), we provide bio notes on this recently promoted Parliamentarian. End summary.

Bio Notes - Richard Marles

[1](#)2. (SBU) Born July 13, 1967, Richard Donald Marles hails from Victoria's industrial heartland, Geelong. Prime Minister Rudd promoted Marles to Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry in his June 6 cabinet reshuffle (Ref. A). When asked about the reasons behind his promotion, Marles volunteered that the industries in his electoral district were major factors. Geelong is home to Ford Australia's aging engine manufacturing plant, an aluminum smelter and other heavy industry which may be impacted under the Emissions Trading Scheme scheduled to begin in 2011. Marles now "reports" to Kim Carr, Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. In addition, he suspected his role in mending a rift within his right-of-center faction in the Victorian ALP played a role in the Prime Minister's decision to promote him.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Marles said he maintains a very close relationship with trade unions including the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), a peak body designed to speak for Australia's labor movement. A former Assistant Secretary of the ACTU, he said the ACTU uses his office in Canberra when Parliament is sitting. Marles served as legal officer and National Assistant Secretary for the right-leaning Transport Workers' Union (TWU) before his move to the ACTU. He stated that he has a very close relationship with Joe de Bruyn, the Shop Distributive and Allied (SDA) Employees Association National Secretary. (Note: The SDA is Australia's largest union. End note.)

[1](#)4. (SBU) Marles described himself as a "peacemaker" who worked to mend the rift between Bill Shorten and David Feeney who run the more conservative "right" faction within the Victorian ALP. This split erupted after a deal to distribute federal and state Parliamentary seats turned bad between Shorten and Feeney, who, along with Marles "hunted as a pack" as young men. Caesar Melham, Victorian secretary of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) told us that a meeting was held on July 10 in which the major right-leaning unions

reconciled their issues. According to Marles, the rift within the right-leaning unions in Victoria has been mended. Marles was also well aware of a separate divide within the New South Wales ALP right faction that opened after New South Wales Premier Morris Iemma was sacked (Ref. B).

¶5. (SBU) Marles comes from a new generation of young union leaders in the ALP that include Victorian MP Bill Shorten and South Australian MP Mark Butler. He was elected to Parliament in November 2007 in the same election that returned the ALP to power under Kevin Rudd. Before his recent promotion, Marles served as the Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and was a member of the House of Representatives Employment and Workplace Relations Committee. He spoke highly of fellow leaders like Shorten and described having a close relationship with Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard and a "friendly" relationship with Kevin Rudd. Marles received a degree in Law and a Bachelor of Science from Melbourne University. His mother, Faye was Victoria's first Equal Opportunity Commissioner and later Chancellor of Melbourne University.

Ministerial Style

¶6. (C/NF) Marles said that he places a strong emphasis on an increased Australian presence in Asia. He believes that Asia will become increasingly important to the Australian economy as Asian economies develop. He would like to see Australia become less dependent on commodities exports, and

MELBOURNE 00000087 002 OF 002

specifically mentioned education as an area for growth. (Comment: Marles' comment is not in line with observations we have heard from Melbourne's big three universities - the University of Melbourne, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and Monash University. These universities are concerned about the impact a growing foreign student population is having on the quality of their education system and plan to appeal to the federal government for additional funding rather than increasing revenue-earning foreign student numbers. Septel for additional details. End Comment.)

¶7. (C/NF) Marles takes a very thorough approach to his new portfolio. He said that he has been "hitting the books" since his June promotion. When asked about other alternatives to Australia's commodities export-oriented economy, he appeared reluctant to respond given that he had not finished his homework. He is a friendly and gregarious interlocutor who appeared somewhat bashful and overcome by his rapid rise through the ALP ranks. Marles comes across as a humble lawmaker and even told several self effacing jokes about being overwhelmed vis-a-vis his friend and later Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd.

Comment

¶8. (C/NF) Marles struck us as a very loyal politician, especially to fellow ALP leaders like Bill Shorten. When asked about Shorten's feelings about being passed over for promotion in the June 6 reshuffle, Marles circumvented the question and defended Shorten. Post notes, however, that Shorten did appear disappointed at a separate meeting with Consul General (Ref. C). Marles is a realistic moderate who, along with his "peacemaker" characteristics, will tend to seek the middle ground on issues. While Marles lacks the obviously burning ambition of a leader like Bill Shorten, he is a very well-connected insider who will likely continue to rise in the ALP ranks due to his strong loyalties and non-confrontational disposition.

THURSTON